

Education & Enrichment

High School Graduation Gift:

Roots and Wings

By Lucy Rimalower, LMFT

"There are two things we should give our children: one is roots and the other is wings."

-Hodding Carter, Jr.

There is no time more salient for this proverb than the summer after high school graduation. Whether your child is planning to go away to college, study locally or join the workforce, she/he will be faced with separation, geographic or emotional, from what has been his social world. As these changes churn, your teen might act as if graduation has granted him the inalienable rights of curfew-free living and exemption from respecting the rules. He might also be utterly terrified. It's going to be a long summer.

Fortunately, he's still under your roof, and despite the diploma,

still able to benefit from the roots that connect him to his family and the wings that let him experience independence and the adult world. What does it mean for your child to embrace the freedom and responsibility of life after high school? And how can you support your child during this transition?

The feelings surrounding separation course deep and wide, from sweet nostalgia to angry acting out to blissful denial. With emotions running rampant, creating some structure can be difficult but also satisfying. Here are some strategies to create "roots and wings" to help your teen and your family navigate and make meaning of this transition.

Review rules and expectations for life post-graduation. Be sure this is a collaborative discussion with your child that allows her to



practice increased responsibility. There's no curfew in college—loosening your grip is part of the transition.

Respect your graduate's (seemingly constant) need to connect with his friends as they prepare to separate. Being with his friends (constantly) is part of your graduate's way of saying goodbye to his high school world. Spending time away from family is also a muscle that needs to be strengthened, for you as much as for your child.

Make family dates. Even if 99% of your child's time is devoted to his friends, make sure to budget some family time, preferably during non-peak-graduate hours. Consider an early dinner or a late lunch. This may be particularly important for siblings who are also in need of closure.

Balance planning and go-with-the-flow flexibility. Stock-

ing up for a dorm room or making over a high school bedroom to feel more "grown-up" requires a lot of work, as does arranging meal plans or food budgets, and other essentials. Engage your child to create a checklist at the beginning of the summer. Make flexible deadlines that give you enough wiggle room so that when the night you planned for Bed&Bath or Target ends up being a big going away party, nobody freaks out.

Check in about feelings. Keep reminding your child that you're available to talk, now and always. Don't forget to check in with your partner or friends about your own feelings. How are you doing with the impact of watching your child wade through this strange transitional period? How are you dealing with the separation?

Talk about communication: Skype, text, email, phone. Re-

spectfully establish how often you expect to hear from your soon-to-be-college-student. She calls the shots about how often she will contact you, but your consistent communication sends a message: your child is important to you, you're thinking about her and you want her to know.

Make plans for reunions. Look ahead on your family's calendar and plan the next visit for the holidays or whenever budgets allow. This will give you all something to look forward to and the comfort of knowing that your family will be all together again soon.

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